II. CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1-25. (Cancelled)

26. (Currently amended) ~~Apparatus for processing a mail piece for which postage needs to be dispensed before delivery of the mail piece, comprising~~ The system of claim 36 where the postage indicium dispensing apparatus further comprises:

an interface for obtaining, from ~~the~~ a mail piece, selected information appearing on the mailing piece, ~~said~~ the information including data identifying an originator of ~~said~~ the mail piece; ~~and~~

wherein the ~~a~~ processor is responsive to at least the selected information for determining whether to ~~dispense~~ generate the postage indicium, ~~wherein said~~ the processor being configured to ~~disallows~~ disallow ~~a dispensation~~ the generation of the postage indicium when ~~said~~ the originator is determined to be unauthorized to expend ~~the~~ a corresponding postage amount.

27. (Original) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein said interface includes a connector for connecting a scanner to said apparatus.

28. (Original) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein the selected information is represented by a bar-code on said mail piece.

2

29-30.   (Cancelled)

31. (Previously presented)   The apparatus of claim 26 wherein
the originator is an individual.

32. (Previously presented)   The apparatus of claim 26 wherein
the originator is an organization.

33. (Original) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein the selected
information   includes   information   representative   of   an
authorization code.

34. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 26 further
comprising a receiver for receiving data representative of cost
of said delivery.

35. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 34 wherein the
processor determines whether to dispense the postage also in
response to said data.

36. (Currently amended) A postage ~~Postage~~ indicium processing
system comprising at least a postage indicium dispensing
apparatus, the postage indicium dispensing apparatus comprising~~,~~:

     a processor for creating a postage indicium, ~~said~~ the postage
        indicium including a proof of payment, for service by a
        first party, and transactional data comprising at least

3

information representative of a transaction amount, ~~said~~ the first party causing ~~said~~ the transaction amount to be paid to a second party in response to at least ~~said~~ the transactional data when ~~said~~ the first party processes ~~said~~ the postage indicium; and

an output for generating said postage indicium.

37. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said transactional data includes information identifying said second party.

38. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said transactional data includes information concerning an originator of said postage indicium.

39. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said transactional data includes an indicator indicative of a method by which the transaction amount is paid to the second party.

40. (Original) The apparatus of claim 39 wherein said method includes an electronic funds transfer.

41. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said transactional data includes a personal identification number (PIN).

4

42. (Original) The apparatus of claim 41 wherein said PIN is encrypted.

43. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said transactional data includes instructional information, the first party causing the transaction amount to be paid to the second party in response to the instructional information.

44. (Original) The apparatus of claim 43 wherein said instructional information includes a request for a confirmation by the first party to the second party that the transaction amount has been paid.

45. (Original) The apparatus of claim 43 wherein said instructional information includes information on a date by which the transaction amount is paid to the second party.

46. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said postage indicium includes a digital signature for authenticating at least part of said postage indicium.

47. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said transactional data is encoded in a bar-code.

48. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said postage indicium includes a human readable portion.

49. (Original) The apparatus of claim 48 wherein said human readable portion includes information identifying said second party.

50. (Original) The apparatus of claim 48 wherein said human readable portion includes the transaction amount.

51. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said postage indicium includes a machine readable portion.

52. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said first party is a postal authority.

53. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said first party is a courier other than a postal authority.

54. (Original) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein the amount of said payment for service is zero.

55. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said postage indicium is generated onto a tangible medium.

56. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim 55 wherein said tangible medium is includes a label.

57. (Previously presented)   The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said postage indicium is generated onto a mail piece.

58. (Currently amended) The system of claim 36 ~~further~~ comprising a ~~Postage~~ postage indicium processing apparatus, the postage indicium processing apparatus comprising:

   a processor for processing ~~at least one~~ the postage indicium including a proof of payment, for service by a first party, and the transactional data comprising at least information representative of a transaction amount; and

   an output responsive to at least ~~said~~ the transactional data for causing ~~said~~ the transaction amount to be paid to a second party when the postage indicium is processed.

59. (Previously presented)   The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said postage indicium appears on a mail piece.

60.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 59 wherein said processor causes said mail piece to be delivered according to an address appearing on said mail piece.

61. (Previously presented)   The apparatus of claim 58 wherein said processor includes a scanner for scanning at least part of said postage indicium.

62-129. (Cancelled)

7

130. (Currently amended) ~~A~~ The method ~~for processing a mail piece~~ ~~for which postage needs to be dispensed before delivery of the~~ ~~mail piece, comprising the steps of~~ of claim 139 further comprising:

   obtaining from ~~the~~ a mail piece selected information appearing on the mail piece, wherein the selected information includes data identifying an originator of ~~said~~ the mail piece; and

   determining whether to ~~dispense~~ generate the postage indicium in response to at least the selected information, wherein ~~a~~ ~~dispensation~~ the generation of the postage indicium is disallowed when ~~said~~ the originator is determined to be unauthorized to expend ~~the~~ a corresponding postage amount.

131. (Original) The method of claim 130 wherein the selected information is represented by a bar-code on said mail piece.

132-133. (Cancelled)

134. (Previously presented) The method of claim 130 wherein the originator is an individual.

135. (Previously presented) The method of claim 130 wherein the originator is an organization.

136. (Original) The method of claim 130 wherein the selected information includes information representative of an authorization code.

137. (Original) The method of claim 130 further comprising the step of receiving data representative of cost of said delivery.

138. (Original) The method of claim 137 wherein whether to dispense the postage is determined also in response to said data.

139. (Currently amended) A method for dispensing payments comprising the steps of:

creating a postage indicium, ~~said~~ the postage indicium including, a proof of payment for service, by a first party, and transactional data comprising at least information representative of a transaction amount, ~~said~~ the first party causing ~~said~~ the transaction amount to be paid to a second party in response to at least ~~said~~ the transactional data when ~~said~~ the first party processes ~~said~~ the postage indicium; and

generating ~~said~~ the postage indicium.

140. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein said transactional data includes information identifying said second party.

141. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein said transactional data includes information concerning an originator of said postage indicium.

142. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein said transactional data includes an indicator indicative of a methodology by which the transaction amount is paid to the second party.

143. (Original) The method of claim 142 wherein said methodology includes an electronic funds transfer.

144. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein said transactional data includes a PIN.

145. (Original) The method of claim 144 wherein said PIN is encrypted.

146. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein said transactional data includes instructional information, the first party causing the transaction amount to be paid to the second party in response to the instructional information.

147. (Original) The method of claim 146 wherein said instructional information includes a request for a confirmation by the first party to the second party that the transaction amount has been paid.

148. (Original) The method of claim 146 wherein said instructional information includes information on a date by which the transaction amount is paid to the second party.

149. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein said postage indicium includes a digital signature for authenticating at least part of said postage indicium.

150. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein said transactional data is encoded in a bar-code.

151. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein said postage indicium includes a human readable portion.

152. (Original) The method of claim 151 wherein said human readable portion includes information identifying said second party.

153. (Original) The method of claim 151 wherein said human readable portion includes the transaction amount.

154. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein said postage indicium includes a machine readable portion.

155. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein said first party is a postal authority.

156. (Previously presented)   The method of claim 139 wherein said first party is a courier other than a postal authority.

157. (Original) The method of claim 139 wherein the amount of said payment for service is zero.

158. (Previously presented)   The method of claim 139 wherein said postage indicium is generated onto a tangible medium.

159. (Original) The method of claim 158 wherein said tangible medium includes a label.

160. (Previously presented) The method of claim 139 wherein said postage indicium is generated onto a mail piece.

161. (Currently amended) ~~A postage processing method comprising the steps of~~ The method of claim 139 further comprising:

processing ~~at least one~~ the postage indicium including a proof of payment, for service by a first party, and the transactional data comprising at least information representative of a transaction amount; and

causing, in response to at least ~~said~~ the transactional data, ~~said~~ the transaction amount to be paid to a second party when the postage indicium is processed.

12

162. (Previously presented) The method of claim 161 wherein said postage indicium appears on a mail piece.

163. (Original) The method of claim 162 wherein said mail piece is delivered according to an address appearing on said mail piece.

164-191. (Cancelled)

192. (Currently amended) ~~A method for sending a mail piece comprising~~ The method of claim 139 further comprising:

    indicating on ~~the~~ a mail piece information concerning a content in the mail piece; and

    providing on the mail piece an indicator ~~[for affirming that the content is included in the mail piece]~~, ~~said~~ the indicator causing a processor of the mail piece to inform a third party of the information while the mail piece is being sent.

193. (Original) The method of claim 192 wherein the content includes a payment.

194. (Original) The method of claim 193 wherein the information includes an amount of the payment.

195. (Original) The method of claim 192 wherein the third party is an addressee of the mail-piece.

196. (Original) The method of claim 192 wherein the indicator includes a digital signature.

197. (Original) The method of claim 192 wherein the information is encrypted.

198. (currently amended) The method of claim 192 wherein the information is incorporated in ~~an~~ the postage indicium.

199. (Previously presented) The method of claim 198 wherein the indicium includes a postage amount.

200. (Previously presented) The method of claim 192 wherein the indicator affirms that the content is included in the mail piece.

201. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein the postage indicium includes a postage amount.

202-207. (Cancelled)

208. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36 wherein said second party is a utility company.

209. (Cancelled).

210. (Previously presented) The method of claim 192 wherein said third party is a utility company.